

Lifeline and Link-Up: Affordable Telephone Service for Income-Eligible Consumers

FCC Consumer Facts

Background

The federal Universal Service Fund (USF) supports the Lifeline Assistance and Link-Up America programs. These programs provide monthly discounts to income-eligible consumers on basic telephone service charges and initial installation or activation for telephone service at the primary residence. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), with the help of the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC), administers the USF. Here are some frequently asked questions about the Lifeline and Link-Up programs.

What Benefits are Available Under the Lifeline and Link-Up Programs?

- **Lifeline Assistance** provides discounts on one basic monthly service at the primary residence for qualified telephone subscribers. These discounts can be up to \$10.00 per month, depending on your state. Federal rules prohibit qualifying low income consumers from receiving more than ONE Lifeline service at the same time.
- **Link-Up America** pays one-half (up to a maximum of \$30) of the initial installation fee for one traditional, wireline telephone or the activation fee for one wireless telephone for a primary residence. It also allows participants to pay the remaining amount they owe on a deferred schedule, interest-free. Federal rules prohibit qualifying low income consumers from receiving more than ONE Link-Up discount at a primary residence. Qualifying consumers may be eligible for Link-Up again only after moving to a new primary residence.

Residents of Native American Indian and Alaska Native tribal communities may qualify for enhanced Lifeline assistance (up to an additional \$25.00) and expanded Link-Up support (up to an additional \$70.00) for one telephone account. See our consumer guide for more information on these enhanced Lifeline and Link-Up programs at www.fcc.gov/guides/promoting-telephone-subscribership-indian-country.

How Do I Qualify for Lifeline and Link-Up Discounts?

The Lifeline and Link-Up programs are available to qualifying consumers in every state, territory and commonwealth. Eligibility criteria vary by state. States that have their own Lifeline program may have their own criteria. For states that rely solely on the federal Lifeline and Link-Up program eligibility criteria, subscribers must either have an income that is at or below 135% of the federal Poverty Guidelines (aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/index.shtml) or participate in one of the following assistance programs:

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How Do I Qualify for Lifeline and Link-Up Discounts? (Con't.)

- Medicaid,
- Food Stamps,
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI),
- Federal Public Housing Assistance (Section 8),
- Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP),
- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), or
- The National School Lunch Program's Free Lunch Program.

Residents of Native American Indian and Alaska Native tribal communities qualify for enhanced Lifeline and Link-Up support if they meet one of the criteria listed above, qualify under their state's Lifeline program (if their state has its own Lifeline program), or participate in one of the following assistance programs:

- Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance,
- Tribally-Administered Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TTANF), or
- Head Start (if income eligibility criteria are met).

The qualifying income in all federal default states except Alaska and Hawaii varies from a maximum of \$14,702 for a family of one to a maximum of \$50,801 for a family of eight. For each additional person in the household beyond eight, add \$5,157.

How Do I Qualify for Lifeline and Link-Up Discounts? (Con't.)

To find the specific eligibility requirements for your state, visit the USAC website at www.lifelinesupport.org. You may also call a toll free number – 1-888-641-8722 – to ask general questions about eligibility, but *not* to apply to participate in the Lifeline and Link-Up programs. To find out how to apply, visit the [USAC website](http://www.usac.fcc.gov) or call your local telephone company.

You can also contact your local telephone company or your state public service commission for more information about these programs and to determine whether you qualify for discounts. Contact information for your state public service commission can be found on the website of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners, www.naruc.org/commissions.cfm, or in the blue pages or government section of your local telephone directory.

Who Pays for the Lifeline and Link-Up Programs?

All telecommunications service providers and certain other providers of telecommunications must contribute to the federal USF based on a percentage of their interstate and international end-user telecommunications revenues. These companies include wireline phone companies, wireless phone companies, paging service companies and certain Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) providers.

These charges usually appear as a percentage of the consumer's phone bill. Companies that choose to collect Universal Service fees from their customers cannot collect an amount that exceeds their contribution to the USF. They also cannot collect from a Lifeline program participant USF fees on any services supported by universal service.

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Who Pays for the Lifeline and Link-Up Programs? (Con't.)

Some consumers may notice a "Universal Service" line item on their telephone bills. This line item appears when a company chooses to recover its USF contributions directly from its customers by billing them this charge. The FCC does not require this charge to be passed on to customers. Each company makes a business decision about whether and how to assess charges to recover its Universal Service costs.

Can I get more than one discounted service?

No. U.S. Government rules prohibit qualifying low income consumers from receiving more than ONE Lifeline or Link-Up discount at the same time. If you are found to be receiving more than one monthly Lifeline service, you will be given a chance to select one telephone company to be your Lifeline provider. You will no longer receive discounted service from the other telephone service provider. Consumers found to be violating this rule may also be subject to criminal and/or civil penalties.

For More Information

For information about other telecommunications issues, visit the FCC's Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau website at www.fcc.gov/consumer-governmental-affairs-bureau, or contact the FCC's Consumer Center by calling 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY; faxing 1-866-418-0232; or writing to:

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554.

You can also view guides on other FCC Universal Service programs on the FCC website at:

www.fcc.gov/guides/universal-service-support-mechanisms

www.fcc.gov/guides/universal-service-program-schools-and-libraries

www.fcc.gov/guides/universal-service-program-rural-health-care-providers.

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